

Del. Aviation Hall of Fame Honors DSU's Dr. Dan Coons and Student

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The Delaware Aviation Hall of Fame has honored Dr. Daniel E. Coons, the founder of Delaware State University's Aviation Program, as part of its 2011 induction class.

In addition, the Delaware Aviation Hall of Fame also honored DSU sophomore aviation major Willie Gonzalez with its 2011 Youth Achievement Award.

Dr. Coons and Mr. Gonzalez were honored along with five other honorees during its 12th annual Delaware Aviation Hall of Fame Banquet on Sept. 24 at the University of Delaware's Clayton Hall in Newark.

Dr. Coons was the founding director of the then-Airway Science Program at DSU from 1987 to 1992. After leaving DSU for a few years to do consultant work in Egypt, Dr. Coons returned to the University to serve as the special assistant for aviation to the DSU Provost from 1995-2005. Even after his retirement in 2005, Dr. Coons has continued to volunteer his time with the DSU Aviation Program

Considered a visionary in the development of the program, his creative proposals have resulted in the University's acquisition of 10 aircrafts, making DSU the only Historically Black University or College in the country that owns and maintains its own fleet of aircraft.

"Being honored by my colleague in the Delaware Hall of Fame, my brother pilots, is one of the greatest honors of my life," Dr. Coons said. "This program made it possible for a lot of young men and women to fly and pursue aviation careers, who otherwise may not have been able to afford such training at other places."

Since its inception the DSU Aviation Program has produced more than 100 graduates with professional pilots or airway management degrees. The vast majority of those students have gone on to work in some facet of the aviation industry.

Dr. Coons, who was nominated to the Hall of Fame by retired Brig. Gen. Ernest G. Talbert of Bear, Del., was inducted along with NASA astronaut Col. Nancy J. Currie, World War II pilots John E. Knoening and David F. McCallister (posthumous), and Vietnam War helicopter pilots John A. Jordan and John P. Renzetti.

Mr. Gonzalez, a 2010 graduate of William Penn High School, was nominated for the Youth Achievement Award by Maj. Steven J. Michael, senior aerospace science instructor at the high school.

"Willie Gonzalez proved himself to be a superb leader in JROTC, and with his success in the DSU Aviation Program, I felt he was a natural to be nominated for the Delaware Aviation Hall of Fame Youth Achievement Award," Maj. Michael said. "Willie has demonstrated a natural ability to lead and motivate his peers and is most deserving of this award."

Mr. Gonzalez has demonstrated great motivation in his aviation education pursuits, both in high school ROTC and in DSU's Aviation Program. Even after enrolling at DSU in the fall of 2010, he still returns to his high school frequently to give back to his William Penn ROTC Program by sharing his experience with the students.

Now at age 19 and just beginning his sophomore year in the DSU Aviation Program, Mr. Gonzalez has already earned his Private Pilot Rating and his Instrument Rating.

"This honor encourages me, because it lets me know I am going in the right direction and it gives me more motivation to continue," Mr. Gonzalez said.

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